



PRESS RELEASE

*Office of the United States Attorney
Middle District of Florida*

PAUL I. PEREZ
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY

400 North Tampa Street
Suite 3200
Tampa, Florida 33602
813/274-6000
813/274-6300 (Fax)

300 North Hogan Street, Suite 700
Post Office Box 600
Jacksonville, Florida 32201
904/301-6300
904/301-6310 (Fax)

80 North Hughey Avenue,
Room 201
Orlando, Florida 32801
407/648-7500
407/648-7643 (Fax)

2110 First Street,
Suite 3-137
Fort Myers, Florida 33901
239/461-2200
239/461-2219 (fax)

Contact: Steve Cole ♦ Public Affairs Specialist ♦ 813/274-6352

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COAST GUARD, BRITS TEAM UP TO MAKE LATEST PANAMA EXPRESS SEIZURE

TAMPA - United States Attorney Paul I. Perez announced today the unsealing of a criminal complaint in Tampa charging seventeen members of the crew of the Panamanian freighter M/V Yalta with conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine while on board a vessel subject to the jurisdiction of the United States. The M/V Yalta was intercepted on June 23, 2003, by the British Warship HMS Iron Duke in the Caribbean Basin north of Venezuela and found to be carrying more than four tons of cocaine. The 489 foot freighter was boarded by the British Navy and a U. S. Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment detailed to the HMS Iron Duke. Upon examination of the freighter, a concealed compartment was accessed which resulted in the cocaine seizure. The M/V Yalta, its crew and the cocaine were turned over to a United States Coast Guard cutter and taken to Tampa, Florida for prosecution. The seizure is another in the ongoing OCDETF investigation in the Middle District of Florida, Panama Express.

Paul I. Perez recognized the contribution of the British Royal Navy and British Customs Service in the investigative and interdiction phases of the seizure. "We welcome the support and assistance of our British allies in our fight against international narcotics traffickers. The ability of our British partners to work cohesively with the United States Coast Guard enhances our ability to engage the drug traffickers on the high seas. In short, this is more bad news for the bad guys." Mr. Perez also praised the efforts of the United States Coast Guard; the Joint Interagency Task Force; the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the United States Marshal service. The Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, Pinellas County Sheriff's Office and the Port of Tampa also assisted in the security of today's operation.

Named in the criminal complaint were: Yuri Chakhrach, Makism Zakurdajev, Yakiv Kibalyuk, Antanas Lukauskas, Milkintas Arunas, Olec Bartkevic, Andrej Tarakanov, Vladimiras Pyzevskis, Volcoymir Kosenko, Gennadiy Volkhonsky, Anatolij Zolotuchin, Vitalij Rudnev, Jurij Pavlov, Arturas Gedvilas, Ivan Dolgushuv, Igor Nikisin and Efren Daniel Marquez-Silva. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Joseph K. Ruddy of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force in the Middle District of Florida.

A criminal complaint is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws, and every defendant is presumed innocent until, and unless, proven guilty.